

C H A P T E R

3

Communication
and the Self-Concept:
Who Are You?





After finishing this chapter, you should be able to

1. Define and explain the formation of the self-concept.
2. Identify how popular culture and technology help shape your self-concept.
3. Define *self-fulfilling prophecy* and explain how a self-fulfilling prophecy can influence behavior.
4. Compare and contrast the ways males and females as well as people from different cultures see themselves.
5. Identify the purposes and functions of the Johari window as a model of self-disclosure.

There are three things extremely hard, Steel, a Diamond, and to know one's self.

—Benjamin Franklin

. . . the self is not something that one finds. It is something that one creates.

—Thomas Szasz

Does what you think about yourself matter? Would it help if your appraisal of yourself were more positive and supported by others? Should it be society's mission to help raise your self-esteem? If yes, why? If not, can you think of any good that can come from feeling bad about yourself? Do you ever want to wake up as someone else? How does who you are come to be?

Whomever we meet in life, whatever we do in life, is filtered through the self. Our sense of self is at the center of all we experience. We think about ourselves and what others think of us. The thoughts we have change as we change. We have the ability to reinvent ourselves. What we think about ourselves affects our communication with others. This leads us to ask a host of other questions: To what extent do you exhibit different selves and take on different roles when faced with different situations and people? How well do you really know and understand your identity? Can you see your identity reflected in the messages you send to others? These are just some of the questions that we will explore in this chapter.

WHAT IS THE SELF-CONCEPT?

Self-concept concerns us all. One sports coach, for example, notes, "If I single some out for praise, I would kill the others' self-esteem." One person praises another for a job that wasn't very well done, observing that "I didn't want to hurt his self-esteem."¹ Some school systems even believe that the promotion of self-esteem should be a central goal of education.² Others challenge the merit of a "feel-good curriculum" and disdain the fact that we walk around on eggshells to avoid hurting another person's self-esteem. Why is self-esteem considered so critical? Consider this:

Amy Hagadorn of Fort Wayne, Indiana, wanted only one day without teasing . . . On Tuesday, she reveled in festivities for Amy Hagadorn Day in Fort Wayne.

*Have you ever been teased?
How did it affect your sense
of self?*

Amy asked for Santa's help after hearing about a Letters for Santa promotion on a radio station. "I have a problem at school," she wrote in pencil. "Kids laugh at me because of the way I walk and run and talk. I have cerebral palsy. I just want one day where no one laughs at me or makes fun of me."

At school Friday, her classmates sang for her . . . A local nurse who has cerebral palsy offered to share with Amy the ways she has learned to strengthen her limbs and disguise her disability. A local man offered to send Amy and her sister Jamie on a \$4,500 toy shopping spree. . . .

A delighted Amy said: "I think I had my Christmas today."³

According to The National Self-Esteem Association, it is important "to fully integrate self-esteem into the fabric of American society so that every individual, no matter what their age or background, experiences personal worth and happiness."⁴ But does high self-esteem have a downside? While people with high self-esteem are happier, high self-esteem does *not* seem to offer immunity against bad behavior.⁵ It appears that people with high self-esteem pose a greater threat to those around them than do people with low self-esteem.⁶ Consider this: Some believe that an overemphasis on reinforcing self-esteem, especially in persons whose self-esteem is already high, has precipitated bullying in some segments of our culture. Why do people tease or bully others? What motivates one person to want to belittle another person? What is bullying? Who is a bully? Bullying is persistent teasing, name-calling, or social exclusion. A bully is likely to be among the most popular people, admired by others, and high among those persons others want to "hang" with.⁷ Some researchers say the behavior of a person who bullies can be attributed to a self-appraisal that is unrealistically inflated.⁸ A prime contributor to aggression in person-to-person interaction appears to be unusually high self-esteem combined with a sense of arrogance and narcissistic tendencies.⁹ Consider the adulation in our society that is accorded our icons of popular culture, including professional athletes and music and movie stars. Our behavior helps precipitate the self-centered, egomaniacal characteristics they too often exhibit. Balance is needed in how much praise we give people, lest we help create in them a perception of their own self-importance that is out of whack with reality.

Rather than thinking that raising self-esteem is the panacea for the individual and social problems that exist in society, we need to work instead to develop our resilience, so that we become better at bouncing back from personal defeats and disappointments.¹⁰ We have to help individuals build from their strengths in order to overcome or compensate for their weaknesses.

As humans, we have a unique ability to reflect on ourselves. Your **self-concept** is your self-appraisal. Included within it is everything you think and feel about yourself. It is the entire collection of attitudes and beliefs you hold about who and what you are. Self-concept is composed of two components: **self-image**, or the sort of person you perceive yourself to be, and **self-esteem**, your feelings and attitudes about yourself, including how well you like and value yourself. Included in your self-image are the roles you see yourself performing, the categories you place yourself within, the words you use to describe or identify yourself, and your understanding of how others see you. Self-esteem, on the other hand, usually derives from your successes and/or failures. Thus, it colors your self-image with a predominantly positive or negative hue. In other words, if you have a favorable perception of yourself, you

In your opinion, is self-control more important than self-esteem?

self-concept

everything one thinks and feels about oneself

self-image

the sort of person one perceives oneself to be

self-esteem

how well one likes and values oneself

Ethics & COMMUNICATION



Self-Concern and Concern for Others

In her book *The New Peoplemaking*, Virginia Satir notes:

Every person has a feeling of worth, positive or negative: the question is, Which is it?

Every person communicates; the question is, How, and what happens as a result?

Every person follows rules; the question is, What kind, and how well do they work for her or him?

Every person is linked to society; the question is, In what way, and what are the results?¹¹

How would you answer each of these questions with regard to yourself? Your parents? Your friends? The people you work with? What does each set of answers reveal about self-concern and concern for others? How is this an ethical issue?

probably have high self-esteem; conversely, if your perception of yourself is unfavorable, you are more likely to have low self-esteem. According to researcher Chris Mruk, self-esteem has five dimensions, which affect your feelings about yourself and your communication with others: competence (your beliefs about your ability to be effective), worthiness (your beliefs about the degree to which others value you), cognition (your beliefs about your character and personality), affect (how you evaluate yourself and the feelings generated by your evaluation), and stability or change.¹²

No matter what your age or position, it is important that you spend some time considering who you are and what you intend to do with the rest of your life. The question “Who am I?” is a serious one. How you answer it is extremely significant, since who you think you are to a large extent determines what you choose to do, how you choose to act, whom you choose to communicate with, and even whether you choose to communicate at all.

Our self-concept is shaped by our experiences.



Describe Yourself

Is it possible to define yourself in just a single word? Can you sort out all the complicated connectors of public and private life, measure all the facets of your personality, cast off what's extraneous, and then name an essential, identifying characteristic? Try it.

When a *New York Times*/CBS News poll asked 1,136 adults to describe themselves in only one word, interviewers received a multitude of answers.¹³

Generally, the respondents seemed to resist labeling themselves as members of a special interest group or easily identifiable minority group; avoiding stereotyping, they chose instead either a broader affiliation or a narrower, more personal response.

For example, none of the 97 Black respondents said "Black," and none of the 967 Whites said that being White was the defining fact of their lives. Instead, the word given most often in the survey was *American*.

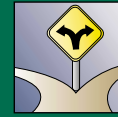
For those who answered, it was certainly a challenge. "You cannot reduce yourself to one word. It is too complicated," said Suzanne Keller, a sociologist at Princeton University. "People really feel multiple. They have multiple poses and attitudes and roles and one is no more important than the next. If they're forced to choose between family and work and leisure roles, which are not even roles but personas, they can't, really, because they live a multifaceted, multitudinous life, not a single track."

Author Margaret Atwood seemed to feel the same way when asked to define herself in one word. She picked *indescribable*, warning that "one must always resist the tyranny of adjectives."

Now ask 10 people to describe themselves in one word. How do their responses compare with the ones in the study?

EXPLORING

Diversity



If someone were to ask you on 10 separate occasions "Who are you?"—and if each time you had to supply a different answer—what types of responses do you think you would offer? What would you say about yourself? To what extent could your answers be grouped into categories? For example, you might see yourself in reference to your sex (male or female), your gender (masculine or feminine), your religion (Buddhist, Jewish, Christian), your race (African American, Caucasian, Asian), your nationality (U.S. citizen, Turkish, German), your physical attributes (fat, thin), your roles (wife, son, student, employee), your attitudes and emotions (hopeful, pessimistic, personable), your mental abilities (smart, slow), and your talents (musically or artistically gifted). The words you use to describe yourself reveal both to yourself and to others what you think you are like.

Part of knowing who we are is knowing we are not someone else.

—Arthur Miller, *Incident at Vichy*

HOW IS YOUR SELF-CONCEPT FORMED?

How did your self-concept develop? The day you recognized yourself as separate from your surroundings, life began to change as you strove to fit into the world as you saw it. In short order, your concept of self—that relatively stable set of perceptions you attribute to yourself—became your most important possession.

While you are not born with a self-concept, you certainly do play a key role in building one.¹⁴ Even though you are constantly undergoing change, once built, the theory or picture you have of yourself is fairly stable and difficult to alter. For example, have you ever tried to revise your parents' or friends' opinions about themselves? Did you have much luck? Our opinions

about ourselves grow more and more resistant to change as we become older and presumably wiser. The statements we make are more or less accurate maps of the territory that is ourselves, but some of us map ourselves better than others do—that is, some of us have a more accurate mental picture of our personal strengths, weaknesses, and needs than others do.¹⁵

A number of forces converge to help create your self-concept. Among them are the image that other people have of you, which helps guide the way they relate to you; the way you experience and evaluate yourself; the roles you perform; the media messages you absorb; the expectations you and others have for you; and the gender, cultural, and technological messages you internalize.

To a large extent, your self-concept is shaped by your environment and by the people around you, including your parents, relatives, teachers, supervisors, friends, and co-workers. If people who are important to you have a good image of you, they probably make you feel accepted, valued, worthwhile, lovable, and significant, and you are likely to develop a positive self-concept as a result. On the other hand, if those who are important to you have a poor image of you, more than likely they make you feel left out, small, worthless, unloved, or insignificant, and you probably develop a negative self-concept as a consequence.

It is not difficult to see how people you value influence the picture you have of yourself and help determine the ways you behave. Nineteenth-century poet Walt Whitman recognized this:

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

ROLES, SELF-EVALUATIONS, BEHAVIOR, AND THE SELF-CONCEPT

Self-concept, besides being your own theory of who and what you are, is a mental picture you have of yourself. This mental image is easily translated into the faces or masks you wear, the roles you play, and the ways you behave. For an illustration of this idea, see Figure 3.1. The top panel presents the self-image of a man who thinks of himself as a lowly cockroach. He has developed this image because he has felt he is performing a dull job in an impersonal work environment. However, when invited to attend a conference, he alters this perception and as a result changes his demeanor and adopts an “executive” appearance. The middle panel shows how this man views various colleagues who attend the conference. One is as proud as a peacock, another as close-mouthed as a clam; still others are ill-tempered (ram), loyal (dog), unforgetful (elephant), dangerous (wolf), and stubborn (mule). Finally, in the bottom panel we see what happens to this man once the meeting is over: He retreats into “roachhood” once more. He reemerges at one point to play the knight in shining armor. However, once he returns to what he perceives as mindless busywork, he views himself as a donkey. However, this man has not completely submerged his better self. When he is called on to make a business decision, he once again changes his self-image and pictures himself as an effective, capable individual.

How do your employer and your friends picture you?

What “masks” might people in business wear?



FIGURE 3.1
How the Self-Image Can Change during a Single Day.

Source: Adapted from art by Paul Furlinger in *Psychology Today*, August 1972, p.5. Jules Power Productions.

If you feel you have little worth, you probably expect to be taken advantage of, stepped on, or otherwise demeaned by others. When you expect the worst, you usually get the worst. Similarly, if you feel you have significant worth, you probably expect to be treated fairly, supported, and otherwise held in esteem by others. When you expect to succeed, you usually find success.

We can conclude that the nature of the self at any given moment is a composite of all the factors that interact in a particular environment. Thus, how you look at yourself is affected by how you look at other people, how other people actually look at you, and how you imagine or perceive that other people look at you. We might say that self-concept is derived from experience and projected into future behavior. Of course, your self-concept may be realistic or unrealistic. Unfortunately, we never really come to know all there is to know about ourselves, so we keep searching for clues.

The language we use, the attitudes we display, and the appearances we present also change as we vary the masks we wear and the roles we perform. In effect, we become different selves as we move from one set of conditions to another. The more we attempt to be ourselves, the more selves we find. It is important to recognize that conditions and circumstances affect the nature

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," poet T. S. Eliot wrote, "Prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." What do you think of such advice? Do you ever "prepare" your face when meeting or interacting with someone else?

Ethics & COMMUNICATION



Age, Physical Challenges, and Self-Esteem

Self-esteem may be related to age and physical ability. According to researchers Justine Coupland, John F. Nussbaum, and Nikolas Coupland, “elderly people are prone to assimilate society’s devalued appraisals of their own social group, and so lower their self-esteem.”¹⁶ Similarly, researchers note that persons who are physically challenged often face myriad social barriers, primarily because they feel isolated from their peers and believe that their futures are limited and that their lives are less meaningful because of their disabilities.¹⁷ On the other hand, in *Old Is Not a Four-Letter Word: A Midlife Guide*, author Ann E. Gerike

notes that aging has advantages, bringing with it a more reliable inner voice, an acceptance that life is not always fair, and a willingness to shoulder responsibility instead of blaming others for what happens.¹⁸ How do you feel about aging? What messages have you received from parents and older friends and relatives regarding their sense of self as they age? What messages do you send older or physically challenged people with whom you relate regarding your estimations of their worth and abilities?

How might online interactions with peers be used to transform the nature of self-concepts

and lives? For example, if a person imagines that others view him or her negatively, low self-esteem can result. In contrast, when a person imagines that others find him or her interesting, self-esteem may be improved. Log on to *Ability Online*. Describe the extent to which sites such as this one can facilitate the strengthening of self-esteem by helping reduce the effect of a person’s disability on his or her self-concept.



of the self. In every situation, how we see ourselves and how we think about ourselves in relation to others direct and modify our behavior.

According to developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, the construction of the self occurs as a person acts on his or her environment and figures out what he or she can and cannot do.¹⁹ In cyberspace, for example, if you don’t like how you are characterized or treated, you can adopt a new identity. According to FreeZone’s Allison Ellis, “If you came into the chat room as one kind of kid and made some other kids angry by being rude, you can change your identity and come back as a different or better person.” Online interaction lets you try again; it gives you a second chance to get it right. It lets you reinvent yourself to morph into different identities. This type of transformation is far different from being a student part of the day, an athlete another part of the day, an employee during the evening, and a child at home. In contrast, in cyberspace you can have parallel identities or parallel selves and use them to develop better relationships and to manage more effectively the many selves that exist within you.²⁰ In fact, the latest version of America Online offers the

A Day in My Life

- List the names of all the people with whom you interacted during a single day this week. For each, identify the environment in which you communicated.
- Next, choose an adjective to describe your image of yourself during each interaction and an adjective to describe your image of the person with whom you spoke.
- Finally, graph your perceptions on a chart like the one shown here, entering each of your responses in the appropriate box. (For example, you might see yourself as shy and "Person 1" as aggressive.)
- Answer these questions: What does your chart tell you about the nature of your self-image? To what extent does your view of yourself change as you move from person to person? What factors can you point to in yourself, the individual with whom you were interacting, or the environment that help account for the changes?
- Which, if any, of the people with whom you interacted made you feel positively about yourself? Which, if any, made you feel negatively about yourself? Which, if any, criticized you so harshly that they came close to destroying your self-esteem?



Skill

BUILDER



largest number of fictive identities per subscriber to date. Technological innovations not only encourage us to reinvent ourselves to find success or happiness but also provide us the tools to do so. Who do you want to be today?

When it comes to thinking about the self and who we want to be today, some of us categorize ourselves as optimists. If we suffer a defeat, we view it as a temporary setback brought about by circumstances, bad luck, or other people. Optimists are resilient; they do not view defeat as their own fault. Psychologist Albert Bandura tells us that an optimistic belief in our own possibilities and competence endows us with feelings of **self-efficacy**. (Note: We are talking about optimism, not unrealistic optimism based on overconfidence.) When we have strong feelings of self-efficacy, we are more persistent, less anxious, and less depressed. We don't dwell on our inadequacy when something goes wrong but instead seek a solution. Those of us who are persistent are apt to accomplish more. And when we accomplish more, our belief in ourselves grows.²¹ Some of us categorize ourselves as pessimists. In contrast to optimists, pessimists lack resilience and believe that bad events are their own fault, will last a long time, and will undermine whatever they do. Instead of believing they can control their own destiny, they believe that

Pessimism is self-fulfilling. Pessimists don't persist in the face of challenges, and therefore fail more frequently—even when success is attainable.

—Martin P. Seligman

self-efficacy

an optimistic belief in one's own competence

According to the psychologist Martin P. Seligman, pessimists can learn to be optimists. How do you think optimism would enhance the self-concept?

Are you the person you think you are, the person someone else thinks you are, or the person you think someone else thinks you are? Why?

outside forces determine their fate. In effect, they “can’t because they think they can’t,” versus optimists, who “can because they think they can.” Psychologist Martin Seligman tells this story:

We tested the swim team at the University of California at Berkeley to find out which swimmers were optimists and which were pessimists. To test the effects of attitude, we had the coach “defeat” each one: After a swimmer finished a heat, the coach told him his time—but it wasn’t his real time. The coach had falsified it, making it significantly slower. The optimists responded by swimming their next heat faster; the pessimists went slower on their next heat.²²

Clues to self-understanding come to you continually as you interact with others and with your real-world or online environments. If you are to understand yourself, you need to be open to information that other people give you about yourself. Just as we tend to categorize ourselves and others, so others tend to categorize themselves and us. For better or worse, the categorization process is a basic part of interpersonal communication. We classify people according to their roles, their status, their material possessions, their personality traits, their physical and vocal qualities, and their skills and accomplishments. Which of these categories are most important to you? Which do you think are most important to the people who are significant in your life? How do others help shape your image of yourself? How do they enhance or belittle your sense of self?

POPULAR MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY: SEEING OURSELVES IN THE ELECTRONIC OR ONLINE LOOKING GLASS

Thus far we have established that your self-image is made up partly of information and feelings drawn from past experiences and partly from your interactions with others. At least five other important sources affect your opinion of who you are: television, film, radio and music, the print media (especially advertisements), and the Internet. We are all influenced by media images, including the personalities and characters that populate the media, to a greater extent than we may realize. Subtly but effectively, these visual and aural media shape our views of ourselves and our relationship to our world.

Let’s consider some ways the popular media and the experience of “growing up digital” affect the picture you have of yourself. First, many media and Internet offerings expose us to a standard of living few of us can expect to achieve. Thus, our evaluation of ourselves as providers—or even as successful—may be seriously colored by what we see. Second, media and online offerings may affect the ways parents and children perceive themselves and each other. After all, both parents and children are exposed to a steady succession of media counterparts who appear either so perfect that even their mistakes become the raw material of a closer relationship or so absurd that their foibles can only constitute charming comedy. Third, the visual media can fill our need for a bigger, better, smarter, prettier, stronger personal image. When we were younger, it was easy and fun to try on television and film images. For example, we could become Harry Potter, a Power Ranger, Daredevil, Lara Croft, a Hobbit, the new Wonder Woman, or Xena. As we mature, however, this

process becomes more subtle. As adolescents, we attempt to become like popular idols or heroes by imitating their fashions, by adopting their speech mannerisms, and by copying their movements and gestures. Thus, we communicate part of the picture we have of ourselves, or the picture we would like to have, through the way we dress, move, speak, and so on. When you put on a certain outfit, comb your hair in a new style, walk or speak in a particular way, or choose to wear a certain artifact, you are telling other people something about who you think you are, whom you would like to resemble, and how you would like to be treated. Fourth, today's teenagers and young adults are often smarter on cyber issues and have more digital expertise than those for whom they work or from whom they learn. You are users, not just viewers or listeners, as were your parents. You have new, powerful tools for self-expression. Among teenagers, being online is now perceived as on a par with dating and partying. The parting line "Call me" is being replaced by "Send me an e-mail"²³ or "I-M me."

The way the physically challenged are depicted in media offerings can affect their self-concept and the way persons without disabilities relate to them. Some years ago, the Mattel corporation introduced the first disabled fashion doll, Share a Smile Becky, as a new friend for Barbie. According to a Mattel marketing manager, "Some kids want a doll that looks like them, and we wanted to make that possible for kids in wheelchairs. But we hope all kids play with her."²⁴ It is hoped that the new doll will help break down barriers for children and others with disabilities, and that children who play with this new doll will also become more comfortable interacting with persons who are physically challenged.²⁵ In contrast, Drew Browning, an expert on portrayals of people with disabilities in the media, sees the introduction of such a doll differently. According to Browning, "It's telethon phraseology, implying people with disabilities need cheering up because they're so pitiful. It makes her sound like a Barbie poster child."²⁶ Browning believes that Beckie should have been Barbie, not merely her friend. What do you think?

Media and online offerings can support us or deflate us. They can cause us to feel good, adequate, or inferior.

If you could trade places with any television or film star or character, who would you be? What does this person, real or fictional, "do" for you? Do you have a more positive image of this person than you have of yourself? Why? Would you like to be more like the media image, or would you like the image to be more like you?

My Media Life

1. Divide your life into three approximately equal stages. (For example, if you are 18 years old, your life would be divided into these segments: ages 1 to 6, ages 7 to 12, and ages 13 to 18. If you are 24, it would be divided into these segments: ages 1 to 8, ages 9 to 16, and ages 17 to 24.) From each life period, select a media offering (broadcast or online) that you believe exerted some influence on the way you thought and felt about yourself, your daily existence, or the people with whom you interacted. Give specific examples.
2. Compare and contrast the image you have of each of the following with the image portrayed in the broadcast or online media. Which image do you prefer and why?

A doctor	The elderly	The rich
A teacher	Gays and lesbians	Business executives
A family	The police	African Americans
A teenager	The poor	Arabs
Marriage		

Media

WISE



EXPECTATIONS: THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY AND THE PYGMALION EFFECT

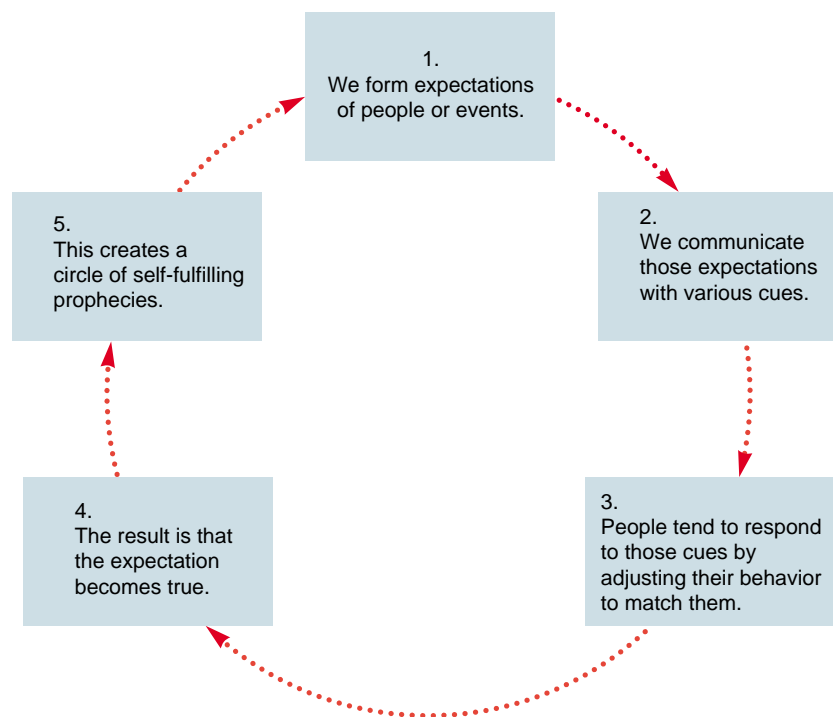
Consider the following excerpt from *The People, Yes*, by poet Carl Sandburg:

Drove up a newcomer in a covered wagon. “What kind of folks live around here?” “Well, stranger, what kind of folks was there in the country you come from?” “Well, they was mostly a lowdown, lying, gossiping, backbiting lot of people.” “Well, I guess, stranger, that’s about the kind of folks you’ll find around here.” And the dusty grey stranger had just about blended into the dusty grey cottonwoods in a clump on the horizon when another newcomer drove up. “What kind of folks live around here?” “Well, stranger, what kind of folks was there in the country you come from?” “Well, they was mostly a decent, hardworking, law-abiding, friendly lot of people.” “Well, I guess, stranger, that’s about the kind of people you’ll find around here.” And the second wagon moved off and blended with the dusty grey.²⁷

self-fulfilling prophecy
a prediction or an expectation that comes true simply because one acts as if it were true

The speaker in this passage understands the significance of the self-fulfilling prophecy. A **self-fulfilling prophecy** occurs when an individual’s expectation of an event helps create the very conditions that permit that event to happen (see Figure 3.2). In other words, your predictions can cause you and others to behave in ways that will increase the likelihood of an initially unlikely occurrence. For example, have you ever anticipated botching a presentation and then did so? Have you ever assumed you wouldn’t like someone and you turned out to be correct? Have you ever had to perform a task that others

FIGURE 3.2
The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Action.



Source: From “Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Better Management by Magic” by Len Sandler. Reprinted with permission from the February 1986 issue of *Training* magazine. Copyright 1986, Lakewood Publication Inc., Minneapolis, MN. (612) 333-0141. All rights reserved.

told you would be dull? Was it? Why? In each instance, did it occur to you that you might have acted in a way that caused the prediction to come true?

Perhaps the most widely known example of the self-fulfilling prophecy is the **Pygmalion effect**. The term comes from the Greek myth of Pygmalion, a sculptor, who falls in love with a beautiful statue of his own creation. The goddess Aphrodite, moved by Pygmalion's obsession with the statue, comes to his rescue and brings it to life. George Bernard Shaw adapted the story to a more modern setting, and Shaw's version in turn served as the basis for the stage and film musical *My Fair Lady*. In this version, Henry Higgins (Pygmalion) seeks to transform a flower seller, Eliza Doolittle, into a refined, well-spoken lady of the upper class. The play illustrates the principle that we live up to labels. We, like Eliza Doolittle, learn to act like the sorts of people others perceive us to be.

A real-life example of the startling effects of self-fulfilling prophecies is a classroom experiment described by psychologist Robert Rosenthal.²⁸ In the experiment, teachers were notified that certain of their students were expected to bloom—that is, to do exceptionally well—during the course of the school year. What the teachers did not know was that there was no real basis for this determination. The experimenters had simply selected the names of the “bloomers” at random. Do you think the selected students actually bloomed? If you said yes, you are quite right. Those students did perform at a higher level than would otherwise have been expected and did improve their IQ scores.

Why did this happen? First, the teachers' expectations apparently influenced the way they treated the selected children. The teachers gave those students extra positive verbal and nonverbal reinforcement, waited patiently for them to respond if they hesitated, and did not react negatively when they offered faulty answers. Second, it seems that the way the teachers treated the students had a marked impact on the way the students perceived themselves and their own abilities. The bloomers responded to the prophecy that had apparently been made about them by fulfilling it.²⁹

This treatment of students, choosing certain ones to succeed, continues. Researchers Myra and David Sadker describe their view of education in the book *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls*:

Sitting in the same classroom, reading the same textbook, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different educations. From grade school through graduate school female students are more likely to be invisible members of classrooms. Teachers interact with males more frequently, ask them better questions, and give them more precise and helpful feedback. Over the course of years the uneven distribution of teacher time, energy, attention, and talent, with boys getting the lion's share, takes its toll on girls. Since gender bias is not a noisy problem, most people are unaware of the secret sexist lessons and the quiet losses they engender.

Girls are the majority of our nation's schoolchildren, yet they are second-class educational citizens. The problems they face—loss of self-esteem, decline in achievement, and elimination of career options—are at the heart of the educational process. Until educational sexism is eradicated, more than half of our children will be shortchanged and their gifts lost to society.³⁰

You should recognize that the self-fulfilling prophecy has important implications, not only for education but also for our personal lives. Have you ever

Pygmalion effect

the principle that we fulfill the expectations of others

Do you have any beliefs that cause you to function in ways that are self-defeating? What are they? What can you do to eliminate them?

Identify people who have functioned as positive or negative “Pygmalions” in your life. Then complete these sentences: I work best for people who . . . ; I work least for people who . . .

joined a group of people you were convinced would not like you? What happened? Very likely you were proved right. What you probably did was act in a way that encouraged them to dislike you. The self-fulfilling prophecy also plays itself out in families. If a parent tells a child that he or she can't do anything right, the child will soon incorporate this idea into his or her self-concept and fail at most of the tasks he or she attempts. In contrast, if a parent repeatedly demonstrates to a child that he or she is lovable or capable, the child will probably live up to that expectation as well.³¹

Biologists have determined that, technically speaking, the bumblebee cannot fly. Fortunately, the bumblebee doesn't know this. Remember: People rise no higher than their expectations.

Galatea effect

the principle that we fulfill our own expectations

The Pygmalion effect is also at the root of many business problems.³² Apparently, some managers treat employees in ways that precipitate superior performance, while many others unconsciously treat workers in ways that precipitate inferior performance. High expectations tend to result in increased productivity, whereas low expectations result in decreased productivity. Thus, subordinates more often than not confirm the expectations of their superiors. For this reason, when you assume a leadership role, you have the potential to function as both a positive and a negative Pygmalion. Which would be more effective?

What about the messages you send yourself? A variation of the Pygmalion effect is the **Galatea effect**. (Galatea is the name Pygmalion gave his statue once it was brought to life.) The *Galatea effect* refers to the expectations we have for ourselves rather than the expectations others have for us. We tend to realize the expectations we have for ourselves. We react to the internal messages we continuously send ourselves. Our feelings about our own competence and ability can exert an influence on our behavior in much the same way that our performance can be influenced by others' high or low expectations for us. Thus, how we and others answer the question "Who are you?" affects how we behave.

GENDER: DO MALES AND FEMALES SEE THEMSELVES DIFFERENTLY?

Do you think you would feel differently about yourself if you were of the opposite sex? If you answered yes, is it because you believe that others would treat you differently? Would they encourage you to exhibit certain behaviors while at the same time discouraging you from exhibiting others?

Research tells us that others do treat us differently because of our gender. For example, we dress male and female babies in different colors and styles. For the most part, our prevalent conceptions of masculinity and femininity are reinforced in the television shows we view, the films we watch, the books we read, the toys we play with, and the online sites we frequent. For instance, young girls are given Barbies that say, "Let's go shopping," while young boys are given G.I. Joes that say, "Attack." A group calling itself the Barbie Liberation Organization attempted to call attention to such sexual stereotyping and make a statement about the way toys can influence behavior by switching G.I. Joe voice boxes with Barbie voice boxes, thereby altering the dolls to say the unexpected. The result? "A mutant colony of Barbies-on-Steroids who roar things like 'Attack!' 'Vengeance is mine!' and 'Eat lead, Cobra!'"³³ The emasculated G.I. Joes meanwhile twitter, "Will we ever have enough clothes?"³³ The point is that the experiences we have during our formative years influence our later views of masculinity and femininity, thus affecting our identities.

As soon as our gender becomes integrated into our self-concept, we form a gender identity. Once we learn the attributes of maleness and femaleness,

our perceptions of self are affected by what we have come to believe about our gender. When asked to describe their characteristics, for example, males mention qualities such as initiative, control, and ambition. Females, in contrast, lead with qualities such as sensitivity, concern for others, and consideration. Appearance plays a major role in the self-image of a woman but is not nearly as integral to the self-image of a man. Why is this so? Can it be because, since infancy, greater emphasis is placed on a female's looks? Can it be because women, more than men, are teased about how they look and how much they weigh?³⁴

Many women develop a less positive self-concept than men do. Our society expects those who are feminine to be nurturing, unaggressive, deferential, and emotionally expressive. Because of this expectation, young women are rewarded for having a pleasing appearance, revealing their feelings, being forgiving, and being helpful to others. While women of all ages appear to value relationships, adolescent girls become so preoccupied with pleasing others that they metaphorically “bend themselves into pretzels.”³⁶ Girls are more likely to be self-critical and self-doubting than are boys. In contrast, men are more apt to develop an independent sense of self. Since men are expected to be strong, resilient, ambitious, in control of their emotions, and successful and, unlike women, are reinforced for displaying these qualities, independence is central to their lives.³⁷ According to John Gray, a relationship specialist and best-selling author, “A man's sense of self is defined through his ability to achieve results. A woman's sense of self is defined through her feelings and the quality of her relationships.”³⁸ What is noteworthy is that male characteristics typically are more highly valued by our society than are female characteristics. Thus, men often feel better about themselves than do women. And that may be why many women try harder and harder to attain success by attempting to be and do it all.³⁹ As Carol Leifer, a standup comic, expresses it: “I just had a baby an hour ago and I'm back at work already. While I was delivering, I took a course in tax-shelter options.”



Others may treat us differently because of our gender.

In one of his columns aptly titled “Beauty and the Beast,” Miami Herald columnist and humorist Dave Barry reported that, for men, being considered average-looking is just fine; for women, being average is not good enough.³⁵ To what extent, if any, do your experiences support such findings and observations?

No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

DIVERSITY AND THE SELF-CONCEPT: HOW IMPORTANT IS THE “I”?

Diversity influences person-to-person interactions in both subtle and overt ways. It affects the way we look at the self, the expectations we have for ourselves and others, and our behavior. Our notion of “self” is shaped by our culture. Who we are, at least in part, emerges from participation in a culture.

In North American and Western European cultures, the self is considered paramount. People from these cultures tend to reflect the importance placed on individuals as they set and work toward the realization of personal goals. In contrast, people from Asia, Africa, Central and South America, places where collectivistic cultures are dominant, are more likely to downplay their own goals, emphasizing instead goals set or valued by the group as a whole.⁴⁰ Japanese parents, for example, do not lavish praise on their children because they are concerned that, if they do, the children will end up thinking too much about themselves and not enough about the group.⁴¹ In Western cultures, the assumption is that your life will be enriched if you are able to define who you are—all your possible selves. Stress is placed on the power of personal control. There is an intra-individual focus.⁴² Even in popular culture, the focus is on self-reliance (“I Did It My Way”), self-realization (“I Gotta Be Me”), and self-love (“The Greatest Love of All”). In the United States, for example, we emphasize self-determination. In contrast to the independence emphasized in Western cultures, the emphasis in collectivistic cultures is on the interdependent self. Identity is not defined individually but, rather, in relation to others. Thus, the focus is extra-individual.⁴³



Go to the *Online Learning Center* at www.mhhe.com/gamble8 and answer the questions in the *Self Inventory* to evaluate your understanding of individualistic and collectivistic orientation.

Idiocentric

exhibiting an individualistic orientation

Allocentric

exhibiting a collectivistic orientation

Distinctiveness theory

a person's own distinctive traits are more salient to him or her than are the more prevalent traits possessed by others in the immediate environment

For members of collectivistic cultures, the self is not of prime importance. In their view, the group, not the individual, is the primary social unit. Thus, whereas individualistic cultures link success with personal achievement, collectivistic cultures link it to group cohesion and loyalty. This basic difference is symbolized by the fact that the “I” in the Chinese written language looks very much like the word for *selfish*.⁴⁴ While Western cultures emphasize self-promotion, Asian cultures decry self-importance and reward cooperation with the group. No one is singled out; members share credit and blame. Members of collectivistic cultures gain a sense of identity via their group memberships, not by stressing their self-importance, as members of Western cultures tend to do.⁴⁵ Loyalties in collectivistic cultures are directed at others instead of the self. For members of those cultures, the “we” takes precedence over the “I”; the self is not developed at the expense of the group. Thus, culture influences our whole notion of self.

Researchers use the terms **idiocentric** to refer to an individualistic point of view and **allocentric** to mean a primarily collectivistic way of thinking and behaving.⁴⁶ Which term would you use to describe your standpoint?

As you can see, your self-concept—how you define yourself—is influenced by your unique personal experiences as well as by your membership in a group or groups. Together with culture, these influences play integral parts in helping you formulate a sense of self. According to **distinctiveness theory**, a person's own distinctive traits (red-headed, minority group member, left-handed) are more salient to him or her than are the more prevalent traits (Caucasian, brunette, right-handed) possessed by other people in the immediate environment. For example, persons who are members of groups that are a numeric minority in the United States are more mindful of their ethnicity. For this reason, a White person is much less apt than a minority group member to mention his or her ethnicity when asked to define himself or herself. As a result, an African-American woman in a large group of Caucasian women will probably be well aware of her race. When the same woman is with a large group of African-American men, she is more conscious of her gender and less conscious of her race.⁴⁷

Idiocentric versus Allocentric

Assess the extent to which you exhibit an individualistic (idiocentric) or collectivistic (allocentric) orientation by evaluating the following statements. If the statement is very important to you, rate it a 5; somewhat important, a 4; neither important nor unimportant, a 3; somewhat unimportant, a 2; and very unimportant, a 1.

I Matter

- _____ 1. I desire to prove my personal competency.
- _____ 2. I've got to be me.
- _____ 3. I want others to perceive me as having stature.
- _____ 4. I need to achieve personal fulfillment.
- _____ TOTAL

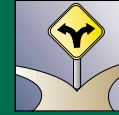
We Matter

- _____ 1. If I hurt you, I hurt myself.
- _____ 2. I desire harmony at all costs in my relations with others.
- _____ 3. My goal is to preserve the welfare of others, even if it is at my expense.
- _____ 4. I am loyal to tradition.
- _____ TOTAL

To determine your score, total the numbers you entered for each category. Which score is higher? A higher "I Matter" score indicates greater idiocentric tendencies. A higher "We Matter" score indicates greater allocentric tendencies.

EXPLORING

Diversity



Your culture also feeds your self-concept. For example, African-American girls tend to have higher overall self-esteem during their adolescent years than do Caucasian or Latina girls. According to Peggy Orenstein, Latina girls experience the most serious self-esteem crisis. She notes that, between the ages of 9 and 15, the number of Latina girls who are happy with the way they are plunges by 38 percentage points.⁴⁸ Despite basic differences in orientation, however, young people throughout the world still share many attitudes regarding the self. Most are concerned about developing and maintaining social relationships, especially with their peers, and most are confident in their ability to assume responsibility for themselves in the future. However, despite this apparent optimism, about 25 percent of the teenagers described themselves as sad and lonely, emotionally empty, and overwhelmed by life's problems; these youngsters are burdened with the weight of poor self-images.

Young people are not the only group that describes themselves as lonely. The 2000 U.S. Census report found that 27 million Americans live by themselves—more than twice the number of single-person households reported in 1970. An editorial in the *New York Times* noted that, although solitary living cannot be equated with loneliness, it may certainly involve some loneliness:

If [individuals are] elderly, they may take great pleasure in having the where-withal to live on their own, especially if they remember when the old depended on relatives for meals and a bedroom off the hall. If they're young, they may rejoice that the pressure's off, that marriage is no longer regarded as the ceremony that separates the desirable from the unwanted. On the other hand, they may not. To some of them, a home empty of companions may be synonymous with an empty life.⁴⁹

In fact, more and more people are reporting that they experience transitory, if not persistent, bouts of loneliness.⁵⁰ People who describe themselves as lonely typically have difficulty making connections with other people. The

loneliness they experience seems attributable to a gap between what they want and what they achieve in their social relationships.

DEVELOPING SELF-AWARENESS

In order to enhance our ability to communicate with others, we need to use ourselves as a resource. By focusing on and acknowledging ourselves, we become more aware of ourselves and more sensitive to our own thoughts and feelings.

The Self-Concept versus the Self

One of the first things we need to become aware of is the difference between the self and the self-concept. The self-concept represents who you think you are, not necessarily the self you actually are. Sometimes your image of yourself may be more favorable than the image others have of you. For instance, you might view yourself as an extremely talented writer, but others might consider you a hack.

Many factors allow us to maintain pictures of ourselves that others may regard as unrealistic. For one thing, we might be so worried about our presentation of self that we fail to pay attention to feedback from others about how they see us. Or others might send us distorted information about ourselves in an attempt to spare our feelings. Or we might be basing our self-view on outdated, obsolete information that allows us to cling to the memories of the past rather than face the realities of the present.

Just as there are times when we view ourselves more favorably than we should, there are times when we view ourselves more harshly than we should. For example, a woman might be convinced that she is ugly despite other people's insistence that she is attractive. Why? This woman might be acting on the basis of obsolete data—that is, influences that are no longer accurate. Perhaps as a child she was gawky or clumsy, and even though she is now graceful and agile, those past traits are still part of her self-concept.

Distorted feedback can also perpetuate a negative self-image. People who are strongly influenced by an overly critical parent, friend, teacher, or employer can develop a self-view that is far harsher than the view others hold. Another reason people often cheat themselves out of a favorable self-concept is the social customs of society. In the United States, at least, it is far more acceptable for people to downplay, underrate, and criticize themselves than it is for them to praise or boast about themselves or display self-appreciation.

In the poem "Song of Myself," Walt Whitman wrote: "I celebrate myself and sing myself." To what extent are you able to celebrate yourself? Do you have a predominantly positive or negative self-concept? Take some time now to inventory what you perceive to be your assets and liabilities. The practice of honestly reviewing your strong and weak points can help reshape your image of yourself.

Viewing Ourselves and Others: The Johari Window

You need to realize that self-understanding is the basis of self-concept. To understand yourself, you must understand your own way of looking at the world. To understand others, you must understand how they look at the world.

If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.

—W. I. Thomas

Focus on Service Learning

Choose an organization such as The American Cancer Society or a homeless shelter. Identify issues related to the purposes of the agency that could adversely affect the self-concept of the agency's clients. What strategies can be used to ameliorate harm to the clients' self-image?

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

1. Your instructor will divide the class into small groups.
2. Each group should use the incomplete sentences listed below as starters in three rounds of conversations. During the first round, indicate how you would have responded to each incomplete statement as a young child (between 5 and 8 years old). During the second round, indicate how you would have responded during later childhood and adolescence. Finally, during the third round, indicate how you would respond to these statements today.
 - a. Other people want me to
 - b. The best way to measure personal success is
 - c. When I do what I really want to do, I
 - d. I get frustrated when
 - e. I want to be a
 - f. I have fun when
 - g. Marriage for me is
 - h. People who are in charge should be
 - i. I miss
 - j. What I really like about myself is
 - k. When I am with people who do a lot of talking, I
 - l. Sometimes I feel like
 - m. A decade from now, I
3. What do the responses tell you about yourself and your peers during these three stages of life? Were there discernible consistencies? Were there changes? Why?

Can you identify some of the things you are hesitant to let others know about yourself? Why are these things easier to hold back than express?

Skill

BUILDER



Some of your answers to the Skill Builder exercise “Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” may illustrate one of the ideas of psychiatrist Eric Berne. Berne believes that we sometimes pattern our transactions in such a way that we repeatedly reenact the same script with a different set of players. In other words, it is not uncommon for us to attempt to “stage” dramas with casts of characters drawn from different phases of our lives. We might, for example, repeatedly enact life scenes in which we express the belief that others are out to get us or that they are jealous of us. This urge to repeat transactions can become a problem if it leads us to failure rather than to success.

Take some time to examine the extent to which your three sets of responses in the Skill Builder demonstrate flexibility rather than rigidity. Attempt to determine to what degree you have eliminated behaviors you did not like. In addition, try to understand what each of your responses says about your past, present, and future needs.

At one time or another, we all wish that we knew ourselves or others better. The concept of self-awareness, basic to all functions and forms of communication, can be explored through a psychological testing device known as the **Johari window**. Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham developed an illustration of a paned window to help us examine both how we view ourselves and how others view us.⁵¹ Before proceeding further, let’s look at the window (see Figure 3.3).

Pane I, the **open area**, represents information about yourself that is known to you and another. For example, your name, age, religious affiliation, and food preferences might all be found in this pane. The size and contents of the quadrant vary from one relationship to another, depending on the degree of closeness you share with that other person. Do you allow some people to know more about you than others?

Johari window

a model containing four panes that is used to explain the roles that self-awareness and self-disclosure play in relationships

open area

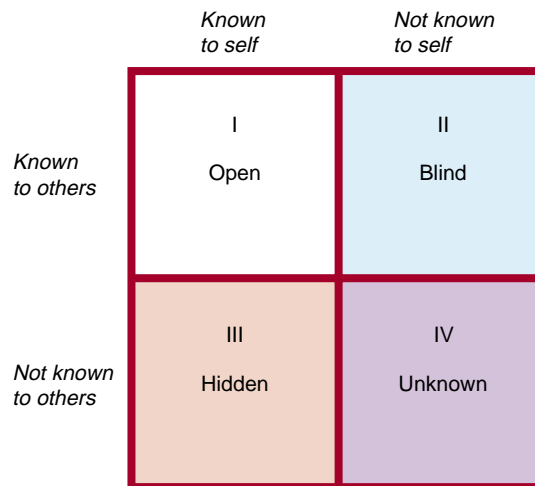
the part of the self containing information known both to the self and others

FIGURE 3.3
The Johari Window.



Go to the CD to view
the animation

Source: From *Group Processes: An Introduction to Group Dynamics* by Joseph Luft. Copyright ©1984, 1970, 1963 by Joseph Luft. Reprinted by permission of The McGraw-Hill Companies.



blind area

the part of the self known to others but not known to one-self

hidden area

the part of the self that contains information about the self known to oneself but that is hidden from others

self-disclosure

the process of revealing to another person information about the self that this person would not otherwise know

What policy would you advocate the media follow regarding the disclosure of private information? Which in your opinion is more harmful: the media revealing a personal fact to the public that an individual did not want disclosed or someone whom you trusted revealing a personal fact about you to someone to whom you did not want to reveal the information?

Pane II, the **blind area**, contains information about you that others, but not you, are aware of. Some people have a very large blind area and are oblivious to their own faults and virtues. At times, people may feel compelled to seek outside help, such as therapy, to reduce the size of their blind area. Do you know something about a friend that he or she does not know? Do you feel free to reveal this information to your friend? Why? What effect do you think your revelation would have on your friend's self-image?

Pane III, the **hidden area**, represents your hidden self. It contains information you know about yourself but do not want others to find out for fear they will reject you. John Powell, author of *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*, expresses the fear of rejection this way: "If I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and it is all that I have."⁵² Sometimes it takes a great deal of effort to avoid becoming known, but at one time or another each of us feels a need to have people important to us know us well and accept us for what we are.

When we move information from Pane III to Pane I, we engage in the process of **self-disclosure**. Self-disclosure occurs when we purposely reveal to another person information about ourselves that he or she would not otherwise know. None of this is to suggest that the hidden area should not be allowed to exist within each of us. It is up to you to decide when it is appropriate for you to share your innermost thoughts, feelings, and intentions with others; it is also up to you to decide when complete openness is not in your best interest.

While self-disclosure is a process we normally control, what happens when this process is taken out of our control? What happens when another party, without our permission, takes information from our hidden area and reveals it in public? While anyone who knows us well can do this, some media practitioners have made a business out of forced disclosures. Tennis star Arthur Ashe, for example, was forced to reveal he had AIDS, although he and his family preferred to keep it private because otherwise the story of his condition would have appeared in a well-known tabloid. Florida Governor Jeb Bush's daughter had to deal with her drug problem under the scrutiny of the public eye. And because gay and lesbian groups threatened to go public with

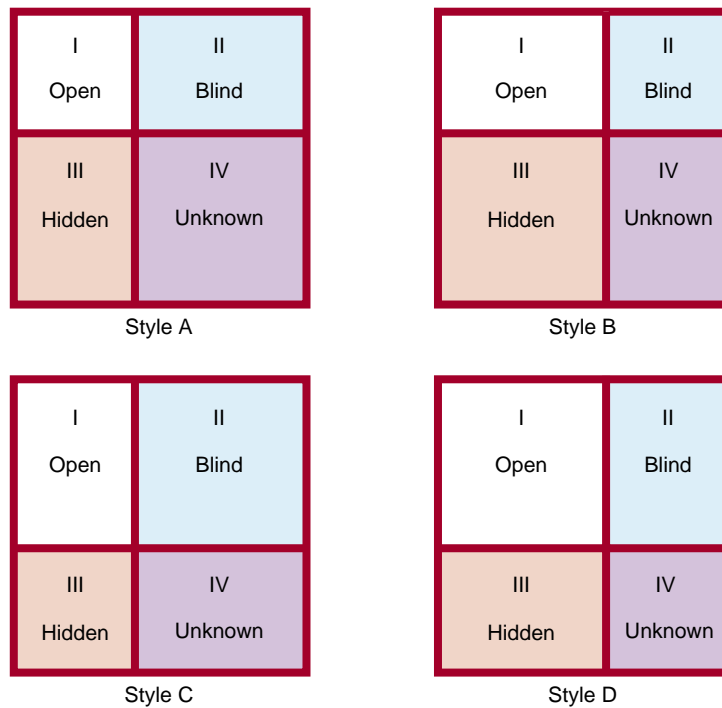


FIGURE 3.4
Interpersonal Styles, in
Terms of the Johari
Window.

the news, David Hope, the Bishop of London, was forced against his will to announce his homosexuality.

Pane IV of the Johari window is the **unknown area** in your makeup. It contains information about which neither you nor others are aware. Eventually, education and life experience may help bring some of the mysteries contained in this pane to the surface. Only then will its content be available for examination. Have you ever done something that surprised both you and the people close to you? Did you and a friend ever exclaim together, “Wow! I didn’t know I could do that!” “I didn’t know you could do that!”

People commonly develop a style that is a consistent and preferred way of behaving interpersonally. Figure 3.4 illustrates four representative styles. Style A is characteristic of people who adopt a fairly impersonal approach to interpersonal relationships. Dominated by their unknown areas, these people usually withdraw from contacts, avoid personal disclosures or involvements, and thus project an image that is rigid, aloof, and uncommunicative. In Style B, the hidden area, or facade, is the dominant window. Here we find people who desire relationships but also greatly fear exposure and generally mistrust others. Once others become aware of the facade, they are likely to lose trust in these people. Style C is dominated by the blind area. People who are characterized by this style are overly confident of their own opinions and painfully unaware of how they affect others or are perceived by others. Those who communicate with such people often feel that their own ideas or insights are of little concern. In Style D, the open area, or area of free activity, is dominant. Relationships involve candor, openness, and sensitivity to the needs and insights of others.

Communication of any depth or significance is difficult if the people involved have little open area in common. In any relationship you hope to

unknown area

the part of the self that is unknown to oneself and others

The media have participated in a number of “outings”—that is, exposing the homosexuality of persons who until then had kept their sexual preferences a secret. In effect, the media have moved information from the hidden area of these persons into the open area without the permission of the persons being “outed.” In your opinion, should anyone other than you ever be in control of what you reveal to or conceal from others?

Which style appears to be most characteristic of you and the people you interact with?

Media images may influence dress and self-expression. What image do you think this person is attempting to portray?



Skill

BUILDER



Symbolizing the Self

Take four objects to class. The first object should reveal something about the way you see yourself, something you believe everyone recognizes about you. In other words, it should represent an aspect of your open area. The second object should reveal something about you that up until this point you believe resided in your hidden area. This second object could symbolize an attitude, feeling, desire, or fear that you had hoped to keep from others but are now willing to move into the open pane. The third object you bring to class should represent how you believe another person sees you. For example, do you believe that a friend or relative sees you as you see yourself? How do you

think your perceptions are similar? How are they different?

Finally, after selecting these three objects, ask someone else to choose an object that represents his or her perception of you. Take this fourth object to class along with the other three. Be prepared to discuss how your perceptions of yourself and the other person's perception of you conflict or coincide. For example, did the object selected by the other person help you move information from the blind area to the open area? To what extent has each phase of the experience altered the appearance of your Johari window?

sustain, your goal should be to increase the size of the open area while decreasing the size of the hidden, blind, and unknown areas. As human beings we are thinking about others and that they think about us. The question is whether we are able and willing to share what we are thinking.

MANAGING IMPRESSIONS

It is normal for us to want to present ourselves to others in desirable ways. However, this leads us to ask some questions: When we say something publicly, do we always feel it privately? Do we present a different self than we feel?

When we create a positive image of ourselves in order to influence what others think of us and how they view us, we are practicing **impression management**. Among the strategies we use to manage the impressions others have of us are *self-enhancement* (we bolster our own image) and *other-enhancement* (we bolster the image of others).

According to sociologist Erving Goffman, we use **facework** to present a public image, our *presenting self*, that is as favorable as possible to others. Our front-stage behavior, Goffman suggests, may contrast with our back-stage behavior, the behavior we exhibit when we are alone.⁵³ Does your experience support this?

SELF-CONCEPT AND TECHNOLOGY

If you're interested in honing the impression you make on others, computer-mediated communication might give you an advantage. After all, the computer gives you more control over what information you choose to reveal to others and what information you decide to keep hidden from others. For example, e-mail enables you to edit the messages you send until you create one that will succeed in communicating the impression you desire. It gives you the ability to correct what you say and take back a message by not sending it. "Some communicators just do better when they can push the delete key."⁵⁴ Online you can also deliver messages that it might be too difficult to deliver, were you face-to-face, especially if you are shy. And if the receiver doesn't like the message you send, he or she can ignore it rather than have to walk away or insult you, were she or he in your presence.

The Internet may also be a factor in influencing the way we think of ourselves. If we have a positive self-concept, we are probably better able to adapt to both the rapid changes and the technological innovations of our world. Some use the Internet to see themselves differently. Do you? The Internet makes it possible for us to inhabit virtual worlds, participate in simulations, and assume different personae. A Pew Internet and American Life Project survey revealed, for example, that teenagers in the United States typically have more than one e-mail address or screen name. Many adopt multiple personae to hide their real identity from friends or strangers. A large number of people experiment online by pretending to be those whom they are not. They provide fake personal data in their e-mails or instant messages. In effect, they use the Internet to try out new identities.⁵⁵ By constructing a number of imaginary selves and experimenting with different kinds of social relationships, they are able to explore unexplored aspects of themselves. They might, for example, pretend to be the opposite sex, conceal or reveal their culture or where they live, and gloat as they hide any number of physical or psychological characteristics. Who we are online can simply be whom we construct or who we want to be for the moment. Instead of playing the roles we play in real life when we make breakfast as a parent, go to work as an employee, or attend school as a student, when online we might simultaneously play a number of varied roles that facilitate our thinking about ourselves in different ways. Because we are able to remain anonymous, we feel freer to cycle through many selves in an effort to construct and reconstruct our identity and assume roles that we otherwise would consider not part of our "real self."⁵⁶

impression management

the creation of a positive image designed to influence others

facework

the means used to present a public image

Do you ever find yourself doing things in private, such as making faces at yourself in a mirror, that you would never think about doing in front of other people?

What if you were given the opportunity to design a personal Web site whose function was to communicate you to all who accessed the site? The persons who opened your site might be friends you already know or faceless, anonymous strangers. What aspects of yourself would you focus on? What facets would you ignore? How much would you reveal about you on the site? Would you include pictures or leave them out? To what extent, if any, do you think that having a personal Web site enhances your ability to manage better the identity you present to others?

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"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Have you ever been anyone but yourself online? If so, what prompted you to adopt an alternative identity? If you spoke with people online whom you later discovered were not who they represented themselves to be, how did you feel? What did you do?

Psychologist Sherry Turkle notes that, in an online world, "The obese can be slender, the beautiful plain, the 'nerdy' sophisticated."⁵⁷ Thus, for some people, communicating online gives them an opportunity to feel more positive about themselves.⁵⁸ In addition, some researchers believe that online interaction can affect psychological health. While some researchers believe Internet use correlates positively with depression and loneliness, others contend that it decreases them and actually enhances self-esteem.⁵⁹ In your opinion, is an online persona an extension of who you are in real life? Is it part of the real you or completely separate and distinct from your real-life self?

e-SEARCH



Where Do You Feel Freer to Be You?

Consider the following comment by a woman who is about to come face-to-face with a man whom she met online:

I didn't exactly lie to him about anything specific, but I feel very different online. I am a lot more outgoing, less inhibited. I would say I feel more like myself. But that's a contradiction. I feel more like who I wish I was. I'm just hoping that face-to-face I can find a way to spend some time being the online me.⁶⁰

To what extent, if any, is the computer changing the way you think and feel about yourself? In which environment, real or virtual, do you feel freer to experiment with who you are and who you can be? Why? What about that environment causes you to feel that way? Be specific. In your opinion, is the Internet an effective social laboratory for self-discovery? Explain with reference to specific sites and personal experiences.

IMPROVING SELF-AWARENESS AND AWARENESS OF OTHERS

Throughout this chapter, we have stressed that we all carry figurative pictures of ourselves and others with us wherever we go. Together, these pictures form a mental collage. Contained within the collage are past, present, and future images of ourselves—alone or interacting with other people. If you closely examine your various images, you probably will be able to discern that how you look in each is related to when the picture was taken, what environment you were in, and with whom you were communicating. Each picture reveals a somewhat different you, because you change and grow from moment to moment, situation to situation, and year to year.

We sometimes forget that our self-image and our images of others can change. Keeping “self-pictures” updated and current is a challenge. Sharpening a fuzzy image, refocusing an old image, and developing a new image are processes that can help you discard worn-out or inaccurate perceptions of yourself and others. The following guidelines can be used to improve the “picture-taking” skills you have gained while working your way through this chapter.

Take Pictures of Yourself and Others

You can increase your self-awareness by continuing to take the time to examine your self-image and your relationship to others. Developing a clear sense of who you are is one of the most worthwhile goals you can set for yourself. Be willing to watch yourself in action. Periodically examine your own self-perceptions—and your self-misconceptions.

Study the composite picture that emerges from your reflections. How close are you to becoming the person you would like to be? You should take enough time and develop enough courage and open-mindedness to engage in productive and worthwhile self-examination.

Encourage Others to Take Pictures of You

How others perceive you may be very different from how you perceive yourself. Obtaining information from others can help you assess how realistic your self-concept is. Others who come to know you may observe strengths you have overlooked, traits you undervalue, or weaknesses you choose to ignore. However, you do not have to accept all the pictures other people take of you.

No one can prevent you from adhering to your own beliefs and rejecting the opinions of others. Looking at other people’s pictures of you does mean, however, that you are at least opening yourself to the possibility of change by attempting to see yourself as others see you.

Refocus, Refocus, Refocus

Carl Sandburg wrote, “Life is like an onion; you peel off one layer at a time.” As you move from yesterday through today and into tomorrow, your self is in constant transition. Try not to let your view of yourself today prevent you from adapting to meet the demands of changing circumstances and conditions. Continually formulating new answers to the question “Who am I?” will allow you to discover the vibrant, flexible, and dynamic qualities of your self.

Thinking CRITICALLY



Reflect and Respond

First, agree or disagree with the following statement; state the reasons for your response.

I may not be what I think I am. I may not be what you think I am. I may well be what I think you think I am.

Then, consider this: Each of your friends, relatives, and co-workers probably sees you

as a somewhat different person. Write a paragraph that describes your perception of how one person from each of these groups sees you. Who has the most positive view of you? Whose view, in your opinion, is most accurate? Why?

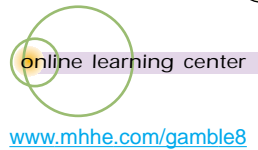
Revisiting Chapter Objectives

1. Define and explain the formation of the self-concept. **Self-concept is the entire collection of attitudes and beliefs you hold about who and what you are. It is the mental picture you have of yourself. It can be positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate. Your self-concept influences all aspects of your communicative behavior—with whom, where, why, and how you choose to communicate.**
2. Identify how popular culture and technology help shape your self-concept. **You are not born with a self-concept. Rather, your self-concept is shaped by your environment, by its technology, and by those around you, including your parents, relatives, instructors, supervisors, friends, and co-workers. In addition, television and films, self-expectations and other people's expectations, gender, and culture can shape your opinion of who you are.**
3. Define *self-fulfilling prophecy* and explain how a self-fulfilling prophecy can influence behavior. **Your self-concept can also be affected by what is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy. A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when prior expectations of an event help create the very conditions that permit the event to occur. The media, as well as other people, help determine which self-fulfilling prophecies you experience.**
4. Compare and contrast the ways males and females as well as people from different cultures see themselves. **Conditions and circumstances affect the nature of the self. Sometimes it seems that we become different selves as we move from situation to situation; our demeanor is affected by our perceptions of others and how we imagine they perceive us. Our culture and our gender also affect the way we see ourselves.**
5. Identify the purposes and functions of the Johari window as a model of self-disclosure. **You can change and improve your self-concept by developing greater self-awareness and self-understanding. The Johari window can help you identify the open, blind, hidden, and unknown areas of your self.**

Resources for Further Inquiry and Reflection

To apply your understanding of how the principles in Chapter 3 are at work in our daily lives, consult the following resources for further inquiry and reflection. Or, if you prefer, choose any other appropriate resource. Then connect

Communication Works



www.mhhe.com/gamble8

Key Chapter Terminology

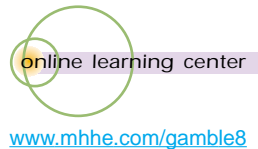
Use the *Communication Works* CD-ROM and the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/gamble8 to further your knowledge of the following terminology.

allocentric 66	open area 69
blind area 70	Pygmalion effect 63
distinctiveness theory 66	self-concept 53
facework 73	self-disclosure 70
Galatea effect 64	self-efficacy 59
hidden area 70	self-esteem 53
idiocentric 66	self-fulfilling prophecy 62
impression management 73	self-image 53
Johari window 69	unknown area 71

Test Your Understanding

Go to the *Self Quizzes* on the *Communication Works* CD-ROM and the book's Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/gamble8.

Communication Works



www.mhhe.com/gamble8

Notes

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